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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000545

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EI](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: IRISH POLICY DIRECTOR ON AFGHANISTAN, NATO PFP
STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT

REF: A. DUBLIN 535

[1](#)B. DUBLIN 521

[1](#)C. DUBLIN 510

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Robert J. Faucher. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 15 Ciaran Murphy (STRICTLY PROTECT), Assistant Secretary General and Policy Director in the Irish Department of Defense, told Poloff there was a slight possibility Ireland would send two military trainers to Afghanistan to help train Afghan security forces. Ireland hopes to ratify an EU Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and a NATO Partnership for Peace SOFA, in 2010. In deference to fears of awakening neutrality-based opposition to the SOFAs, the two SOFAs will apply only to Irish troops outside of Ireland and not/not to non-Irish troops in Ireland. U.S. troops transiting to Afghanistan and Iraq through Shannon airport in Ireland will continue to be handled informally. END SUMMARY.

SMALL, LARGELY SYMBOLIC, TRAINING MISSIONS

[1](#)2. (C) Murphy said Ireland had been exploring opportunities to contribute trainers to Afghanistan, but faced security-related and political obstacles. He described discussions with Canada on sending two Irish soldiers, probably a Lieutenant or Captain and an NCO, as instructors in a Canadian-led training program for junior officers and NCOs. Other participants would be from Sweden and Finland. This idea had been rejected as too dangerous, however, since Canada would not be able to provide logistical support such as secure housing or secure transportation.

[1](#)3. (C) The project's advantage would have been, according to Murphy, its political palatability in a country protective of its neutrality. Murphy said his soundings had confirmed that working outside the NATO context with the Canadians, and with fellow neutral countries Sweden and Finland, would have met with the approval of the pacifist-oriented Green party (the junior coalition partner in the government) and of the Irish parliament.

[1](#)4. (C) Cautioning that he had "just heard of this yesterday," Murphy told Poloff that Irish trainers might/might participate in a similar, but NATO-led, training mission. This possibility, too, would have to pass scrutiny on security grounds and be approved by the parliament before getting a go-ahead. Parliament approval would be more difficult, Murphy speculated, because of the NATO moniker, but he said parliament could probably be won over with the argument that Ireland must support the international community's efforts to build the capacity of the Afghan

security forces to provide for their own security.

NO SOFA COVERING U.S. TROOP TRANSITS

15. (C) When Poloff raised the possibility of concluding a SOFA agreement with Ireland to cover U.S. troops transiting through Ireland's Shannon airport on the way to/from Afghanistan and Iraq, Murphy insisted that it would be politically impossible to do so. He explained that, because the Irish constitution forbids training or stationing of foreign troops on Irish soil, Ireland could not conclude a SOFA that would provide for the presence of foreign troops in Ireland. Elaborating on that point, Murphy said that the two SOFA's that he hopes Ireland will ratify in 2010, a SOFA with European Union member states and a SOFA with NATO Partnership for Peace countries, would both include provisos that they do not/not apply to foreign troops transiting through Ireland, but only to Irish troops on missions outside Ireland. (NOTE: Whether the Irish constitution forbids training or stationing of foreign troops in Ireland, as Murphy claims, is open to question; the relevant passage, Article 15.6., states: "The right to raise and maintain military or armed forces is vested exclusively in the Oireachtas (Parliament). No military or armed force, other than a military or armed force raised and maintained by the Oireachtas, shall be raised or maintained for any purpose whatsoever." END NOTE.)

16. (C) Murphy further averred that, while the Irish constitution does not forbid foreign troops transiting through Ireland or coming for ship visits, as U.S. troops do, a SOFA that included provisions for transiting troops would require legislative approval, since the constitution gives the Irish parliament authority over military forces. Getting

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legislation approving troop transits, and giving U.S. troops transiting Ireland any sort of special status, said Murphy, would entail a major public debate that would shine a spotlight on the fact that U.S. troops are transiting Ireland on the way to Afghanistan; it would awaken the opposition of an Irish populace that is very zealous of Ireland's neutrality. Murphy added that it could also jeopardize Irish national security, since it would highlight Ireland's help to the U.S. and thus expose it to possible terrorist attacks by al Qaeda or associated groups. The conclusion to all of this, Murphy maintained, is that the current informal arrangement, in which troops are transiting regularly and without incident, should remain in place.

17. (C) COMMENT: Irish officials have been noncommittal and reticent in our engagement with them on additional contributions to Afghanistan (reftels), but profess to want to contribute more. We are stressing to them the symbolic importance of making an additional contribution, of trainers and/or development assistance, in time for the January 28 London conference. Judging from our conversations with interlocutors, including Murphy, an additional troop contribution appears not to be forthcoming; however we will keep pressing the Irish on additional police or troop trainers and development assistance. END COMMENT.

ROONEY